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SCHOOLS

BCS parents host summer bridge camp for students in need

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Zoe Morgan/Town Crier Editorial Intern
Bullis Boosters Summer Bridge Camp counselor Sonia Uppal teaches students the basics of computer coding last week.

The Bullis Boosters Summer Bridge Camp aims to reduce the achievement gap by offering a hands-on academic and enrichment program to ease the "summer slide" for underserved students.

The weeklong camp, held July 27-31 at Bullis Charter School, targets local English Language Learners and students entering grades 2-4 who receive a free or reduced-priced lunch. This year's camp hosted 45 students, most from Santa Rita and Monta Loma elementary schools.

Bullis Charter School parents launched the camp three years ago. According to Grace Yang, one of the parent organizers, the camp relies on support

from many different parts of the community. A number of middle and high school students serve as counselors and counselors in training, adult volunteers help teach lessons and local businesses donate food and other materials.

"We really try to make this a community initiative where we're really getting everyone involved," Yang said.

Hands-on language-arts and science engineering learning is integrated into many different parts of the camp. Two instructors, one from Castro Elementary School and one from Bullis, teach lessons to the students. Outside groups including Explorabox and i3 offer supplementary activities. At this year's camp, student counselor Sonia Uppal taught students entering fifth grade basic coding.

Student counselors help with a variety of tasks around camp, including assisting teachers in the classroom, answering campers' questions and preparing food.

The Summer Bridge Camp also incorporates learning opportunities in nonacademic activities like snacktime, teaching campers about cooking, nutrition and food science.

For many campers, the free Bridge Camp may be their only enrichment or academic exposure over the summer months.

"Our initial intent ... was to slow the summer slide – that when the kids come back to school in August, they've already been thinking about fractions, they've already been thinking about sentence structures. ... They're already in that mode and it just makes their entrance into school a little bit brighter," said parent organizer Martha McClatchie.

In the future, camp organizers intend to refresh content and create a standardized outline to share with others who may want to start their own programs. McClatchie added that they want to keep the camp small to ensure that students continue to receive individualized attention.

For more information, visit bullisboosterscamp.org.

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